

Grunt's Eye View: What to do about Iraq?

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The short answer is: step back. We have gotten ourselves into a war that cannot be won by taking some piece of land or eliminating an enemy army. There is no front line to push forward and no centralized enemy network to destroy. Every day that we fight, more people fight against us; and the more troops we put on the ground, the more Americans die. We have lost 2000+ U.S. lives, tens of thousands of Iraqis, and billions of dollars. So far, all we have bought with all that is a guarantee for more of the same.

So what can we do? We must understand who we are dealing with. From my experience of the Iraqi people they have neither overly complex motivations nor an inexhaustible desire for violence. Iraqis want what most people want: to make a living and raise their families in peace. Many I have talked with said they hated Saddam for his brutal rule and lack of care for his people; however, they said that it was better than living in daily fear of U.S. bombings and foreign insurgents. Iraqis believe they have had their stability and security taken from them by the U.S. invasion and feel they must do something to regain their freedoms. They look around and see choices for whom to support, but none are good choices.

Just like in the U.S., those in power seek to maintain and expand that power, often at the expense of ethics. There are some charismatic individuals that believe that violent resistance is the answer to all of Iraq's ills and gather followers to their cause. Many Iraqis support these men because it is the only option in the face of the American

invasion which has destroyed their way of life. Unfortunately, now there are also foreign fighters among the resistance in Iraq. Those who have long sought to fight against the U.S. now have their chance in a place where they may even win. These foreign fighters do not have widespread public support, but they are tolerated by Iraqis as long as they help the native resistance.

Even if the U.S. offers the best alternatives for Iraqi leadership and stability the Iraqi people will reject them. It has been over two years and we have given them nothing but death and instability. We have gone too long without giving them basic security and we have made too many bad decisions in choosing which Iraqis should lead Iraq.

We need to step back. The violence is tearing down the nation of Iraq faster than all of billions of dollars can rebuild it. Every time an Iraqi gets caught in the crossfire we lose more goodwill than building a school can make. Our presence is creating a cause for normally opposing factions to rally around. We are defeating the rule of majority by collaborating with them, and thus we are destabilizing the country of Iraq. The U.S. presence must be diminished.



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This does not mean that we leave Iraq, but that we take our hand out of politics and our troops off the streets. It must start by rapidly discerning how many Iraqi police and soldiers are required to provide security for the country. A training timetable must be created, implemented and observed to get these Iraqis on the

ground. The training should not be conducted by the U.S., but either by competent Iraqis or a third party government so that the new force will at least have a chance of being accepted by the Iraqi people.

Once that timetable is in place, we can announce a schedule for the draw down of U.S. troops and another schedule for getting our troops off the streets and behind the walls of our bases in Iraq. Just by pulling our troops off the streets we take away the fuel of the resistance. The U.S. must maintain a presence in Iraq in case of a massive influx of foreign fighters, but these troops should be in bases out of the city centers and out of the view of Iraqis.

When our troops are off the streets and replaced by Iraqis the resistance will begin to dissolve. The people of Iraq are not so radical in their religion that they will continue to fight over ideology after the presence of the foreign occupier has diminished. We fear radical Islam in Iraq, but our fear keeps our heavy hand in all things, and our hand is what lifts up those radical leaders to the pulpit where Iraqis are more likely to hear them.

Let Iraq rebuild Iraq. We owe the Iraqis the money and support they need to rebuild their nation. What we have given them is a massive occupying force and contracts to foreign companies that are paying foreign contractors ten times as much to fill a job that an Iraqi could do. Iraqis are not uneducated or untrained; we must allow the industries and people in Iraq to rebuild their own country. Along with pulling our troops off the streets we need to pull our contractors back too.

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Reconstruction money should first go to Iraqi companies. With every job we put back into the Iraqi economy we take a possible resistance fighter off the streets. Jobs provide stability and pride to people living in chaos. Foreign workers create resentment. Instead of giving contracts to foreign companies we can offer incentive to Iraqi businesses to expand or slightly shift focus depending on what the reconstruction effort requires. Give Iraqis pride in their jobs, pride in their country and pride in themselves, and we will take away the power of those who offer violence as the solution to Iraq’s problems. ■